bids, are being denied contracts in Mauritius;

(b) if so, the reasons therefor;

(c) whether the issue was taken up during the recent visit of Mauritius delegation to India; and

(d) if so, the outcome thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH): (a) and (b) There have been press reports to this effect.

(c) and (d) The general issue of promoting trade and investment between the two countries, including expansion of oportunities for Indian companies, were taken up during the state visit of PM of Mauritius to India in November 2003. It was also agreed to explore the possibility of concluding a Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement which would eventually lead to a Free Trade Agreement.

Recruitment of Nepalese by ISI

1023. SHRI V. NARAYANASAMY:
SHRI UDAY PRATAP SINGH:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware of the fact that Pakistan's ISI is recruiting Nepalese Youth and made Nepal as well as Bhutan as its launching pad for anti-India activities; and

(b) if so, whether Government have taken up the matter with Nepal?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI VINOD KHANNA): (a) and (b) The Government is concerned about ISI misusing the Nepalese territory and the open India-Nepal border for activities inimical to India's interest and is seized of the matter.The Government has noted the several instances of arrest of staffers of Pakistani Embassy in Kathmandu for being in possession of RDX and/or fake Indian currencies. Such officials have subsequently been asked to leave the country by Government of Nepal.

There is close cooperation between Nepal and India with regard to

combating crime and terrorism. Both countries have stated that they would not allow their territory to be used for activities inimical to the interests of either country. Measures have been taken to enhance cooperation with Nepal, including in the field of intelligence and effective border management. A bilateral institutional mechanism has been evolved which includes a Joint Working Group on Border Management, Home Secretary Level Talks and Bilateral Consultative Group on Security Issues to jointly address issues relating to maintenance of peace and security and prevention of criminal activities in the India-Nepal border areas. The two Governments are in the process of finalising an Agreement on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters and an updated Extradition Treaty. Regular dialogue of Customs officials also takes place under the Agreement for Cooperation to control Unauthorised Trade. The Special Service Bureau has been deployed at all sensitive places along the border with Nepal to strengthen security in the border areas.

So far as Bhutan is concerned, no incidence of ISI's direct involvement has come to the notice of the Government of India.

Indo-Russian cooperation in private sectors

1024. SHRIMATI SAVITA SHARDA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether a decision has been taken between India and Russia regarding cooperation in private sector;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether there is any proposal to establish Indo-Russia trade center for the above purpose; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH): (a) and (b) Private sector companies and entrepreneurs of India and Russia have been engaged in healthy trade and investment cooperation. Almost the entire bilateral trade between India and Russia today takes place through private agencies. Hon'ble Prime Minister visited Russia from 11-13 November 2003 along with more than ninety businessmen in order to, *inter alia,* promote this interaction. Both countries have agreed to take a number